

What are the aims of the Homebirth Movement in New Zealand and how can they best be achieved?

Most people would agree that they are:

1. To provide education, information and support to all those involved with or interested in Homebirth.
2. To ensure the continued existence of homebirth as a birth option and to work for increased political and medical recognition.
3. To seek support, and improved conditions, pay and status for professionals in the domiciliary service.

The first aim can be achieved at local level; each group is best able to gauge local needs and make use of local abilities - though there remains the question of where do they as a group get their information and support from? An informal communication and sharing network from group to group may solve this problem and as the majority of people choosing homebirth are purely concerned with the personal aspects of their decision their needs and desires could be met in this way.

There are however, many interested in the wider issues of homebirth who recognise that homebirth is under threat and can only be a viable alternative if strenuous and concerted efforts are made to achieve the aims outlined above. Can this be done by local groups working in isolation?

I believe not, mainly because the political clout of a national organisation pursuing aims arrived at by consensus is much greater than that of individuals or dis-united groups.

True, a very large group with an active and politically aware membership, such as the Auckland HBA, does already have considerable influence and power, so much so, in fact, that where groups work separately, the smaller groups are in great danger of being ignored and held of no account by outsiders.

We need as a group to uphold the rights and support the views of all our members, and to help each other achieve our objectives. To do this, we need a mechanism whereby all members have the chance to participate so that initiatives on the political scene have the support of everyone - this does not weaken the larger, stronger groups but does strengthen the smaller groups. And I believe, in a minority organisation such as ours, there is no national body, despite its name, unless it truly represents all homebirthers in New Zealand.

A National organisation serves as a focal point, a clearing and store-house of information and records (invaluable for later research), and starting point for interested parties. Also, in a properly constituted and incorporated body, there is protection against claims of membership by people who are not necessarily sympathetic to the aims of Homebirth in New Zealand. (Where no criteria for membership exists other than goodwill, there is nothing to stop a peripheral interest group, e.g. the waterbirth people, claiming to be part of the homebirth

movement.) I think these benefits alone justify the continued existence of a national body but I believe it is time that its structure, organisation and constitution were reconsidered and reordered in a way that suits the present membership (all of us and not just some.) This means flexibility of structure but should not necessarily mean no structure - that would be like trying to build a house out of jelly,

I do not intend here to go into the specifics of organisation and structure: that is a matter for discussion, but I do most strongly feel that no progress can be achieved unless there is unanimity over the need for some kind of national body through which we can work in our own preferred ways, to achieve the continued existence of homebirth in New Zealand.

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